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Sen. Fulbright, J. Wm.
Carver, George

Publishing Scholars in the CIA

Should employees of the Central Intelligence Agency be permitted to publish books or articles which tend to support current American foreign policies, without disclosing their affiliations with the agency? This is the question Sen. J. William Fulbright (D-Ark.), a critic of U.S. policy in Vietnam, has asked of the CIA.

It is a fair question which deserves—and has been promised—full discussion by the agency.

The issue Fulbright is getting at is essentially one of propriety: whether a writer, in not publicizing his ties with the CIA, might be trying to substitute official propaganda for independent scholarship in presenting views and studies to the reading public.

Fulbright's query was prompted by disclosure that the author of an article on "The Faceless Vietcong" in the current issue of the prestigious quarterly Foreign Affairs is a full-time analyst for the CIA, though the magazine did not identify him in this way. The author of the impressive analysis of the origins and political structure of the National Liberation Front is George A. Carver Jr., listed only as a student of Asian affairs and a "former officer in the U.S. aid mission in Saigon."

The scholarship and conclusions in Carver's article—neither of which appear to have been challenged by Fulbright—were obviously the products of his analytical work for the CIA. Does this make what Carver says, or what is said by other CIA employees who publish books and articles, automatically suspect as to intent? Fulbright's criticism implies that it does.

The suspicion apparent here, and in other cases involving CIA ties with universities and publishers, is that legitimate scholarship is unavoidably compromised when carried out under the auspices of the CIA. Since the agency is an important part of U.S. foreign policy machinery, skeptics might conclude that everything published by agency employees must be intended to further official U.S. interests.

This is a point which obviously has to be considered.

But what must also be considered is that the CIA employs numerous recognized scholars and specialists in many fields, persons whose chief concern, like that of their university colleagues, is with facts. Their contributions to knowledge are of recognized value. Their ties with the CIA have not jeopardized their independent research, or their responsibilities as scholars.

Exposure after the fact, as in the Carver case, raises what clearly may be unfair doubts. An obvious solution to this problem would be for the CIA to permit its publishing scholars to identify themselves as employees of the agency. This might lead to a more critical public appraisal of their work, but that in itself has never been a deterrent to good scholarship.